



Before depyramidizing, let's reverse the pyramid!

Subsidiarity's apology

military-Earth thinking notebook

le Chef de bataillon Bertrand EPSTEIN

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This remarkable praise of subsidiarity earned its author the "Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque" prize in 2014.

"**The**hardest thing for me is to do nothing; I am terribly tempted to intervene, but it is up to the men on the field to fight and they do it well" [1]. 1] Patton does not confide here to his newspaper his aversion to office life, but he reminds his reader that the leader's action is effective and legitimate only on condition that it promotes the autonomy of the subordinate.

The true nature of authority is to be subsidiary. To appropriate this reality is undoubtedly an arduous task. It is also an opportunity for armies in constant change, because subsidiarity offers the decision-maker the key to virtuous authority. Freeing up energies that have been left at rest, armies will be able to renew their ways of thinking and acting without disguising them.

Since the obvious has undoubtedly disappeared in terms of authority, we must make the effort to go back to the conceptual level in order to draw concrete lessons.

What is authority?

For at least two generations, the erroneous image of a liberating authority has prevented us from seeing that authority is at the heart of the notion of human dignity.

Advanced liberal and democratic societies often develop the image of inappropriate

authority. Everywhere we are constantly emphasizing what authority takes away from freedom and equality. In the world of leisure and pleasure, political, police or paternal authority is above all a power that frames and constrains individual freedoms. The exercise of authority is furthermore accompanied by a hierarchy that is in opposition to the equal dignity of individuals. Because it distinguishes between men who are born free and equal, authority is the mother of inequalities which it feeds on. In the end, we are invited to admit that authority, supposedly liberticidal and unequal, would degrade human nature. It then becomes forbidden to forbid and urgent to engage in civil disobedience. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that masses of indignant people appear in our societies because "to revolt is to decide to stay alive". Finally, "we are no longer able to understand what authority really is,"[2] wrote Hannah Arendt in 1968, marking the confusion of minds under the onslaught of ideologies and fashions.

Yet the notions of authority and dignity are far from being opposed. Conceptually, dignity is understood first and foremost as a high office, a charge giving the bearer of it an eminent rank. An individual is said to have been "raised to the dignity of"; by this recognized quality, he is also said to be "authoritative" in a particular field. The second meaning of dignity is gravity or restraint in manners. Expressive attitude is part of the needs of every authority. Military ceremonial is a fine example of this. If the military leader receives his authority from the law, the ceremony during which he is invested with his function, by its grandeur and symbols, shows the respect that is linked to authority. Conversely, it is hard to imagine a lasting respect for a deluded and buffoonish authority. "Without the ceremonial, everything dies", including authority itself. Finally, dignity marks the respect due to a person. If respect begins with the office of leader, the leader must strive to earn that respect by acquiring the qualities that will make him or her not a representation, but an embodiment of authority. Finally, to use Freund's definition, authority is "the ability to rise to the tasks of the office one holds" [3]. 3] By these qualities, a leader is thus said to be worthy of the authority entrusted to him.

Above all, authority is one of the foundations of human dignity. The qualities that make a leader respected (competence, will, loyalty...) are in fact the same qualities that also make every virtuous man worthy of respect. "Dignity is basically the value of the human person as an authority,"[4] a person with free will and the capacity to create that is inalienable. This intimate capacity is the foundation of the value of the human person. It is because it is a world in itself that each man remains a mystery. It cannot be grasped and probed in its entirety. At the end of the day, he keeps his share: "I am the captain of my soul, I am the master of my destiny", says the poem. Man's sovereignty is indeed the core of his worth.

As a pillar of dignity, authority is therefore overshadowed by a human nature that is beyond it and whose quality it only enhances.

"The leader is the one who needs others". Authority is second, because it has no meaning in itself and because its nature is first of all to be turned towards another.

The leader, as his name indicates, is in the lead. He has the power to decide and direct action. As such, he is often, for simplicity's sake, the symbol of the group he leads. His function and the influence of his actions therefore commonly place him "above". Edmond Rostand is right to write: "In the book with its sublime chapters, Capitals, it is you who compose the titles, and it is always on you that the eyes stop" [5]. 5] Indeed, the first figure

we retain from the group that leads the action is the figure of the leader.

Does that mean that authority is first? Certainly not, because authority doesn't exist by itself. That certain prerogatives accompany authority is one thing. But the origin of power is not in power itself. Without its parents, the child dies. A father's power is profoundly concrete and suppletive. His authority lasts only as long as the task of protection which is his. For Hobbes, power authority is born of a social contract that remains a deliberate choice. Without another, free one, which is its point of application, authority is mere violence or it does not exist. We know that the leader is nothing without the troop. Few effective leaders think alone in action; those who lead alone do not exist. Have we seen a king without a subject or a kingdom anywhere but Patagonia?

Above all, authority does not exist for itself and finds in the deployment of the other the purpose of its action. When the ruler only seeks to strengthen his own power, his authority becomes illegitimate because it has no meaning in itself. It is literally meaningless because it has no purpose of its own. It only contributes to a goal that precedes and exceeds it. In this sense, the chief always performs a service task: he does not elaborate a purpose, but assumes, understands, promotes, unifies. He enables the development of perfection, which is not the invention of the good that a leader cannot invent, but the deployment of the being. The purpose of authority is part of its etymology. In Latin "augere" means "to make grow, to make grow". The object of authority is the deployed autonomy of the other.

Finally, authority exists neither by itself nor for itself. Its raison d'être is the other. What consequences can be drawn from this on the command and functioning of hierarchical organizations?

Power of Subsidiary Organizations

The subsidiary nature of authority establishes the principle of a legitimate and effective command for the chief: action in modesty.

The reality of authority is tested only in action. It is in action that authority leaves the conceptual habit to materialize and take shape. Authority is not a pure idea; it exists when it is tested. Unless he gets lost, the leader cannot desert the field of action. This is as true in business as it is on the battlefield. Subsidiary, therefore, does not mean erased. If the higher echelon intervenes, it is to make up for the maladjustment of the lower echelon. In the spirit, this substitution corresponds to a state of exception in the sense of temporary. To supplant does not mean to supplant because the individual has vocation to recover his autonomy. He is capable of it. Full powers are entrusted to the political authority to respond to an emergency situation that is not intended to last. "If the powers of exception were permanent, they would not have been invented" [6]. Basically, the aim of the authority in action is to put an end to the need for its implementation as quickly as possible. Armies, oriented towards action in exceptional situations, naturally deploy a more marked semantics of authority. The figure of an authority adapts to its environment. Its nature is not altered by it.

For armies, as elsewhere, the legitimacy of authority depends on its capacity to let the subordinate deploy his autonomy within the framework set by his mission. It is undisputed that a leader has to deal with the limitations of subordinates who are all competent in different ways according to their own backgrounds. The leader must therefore appoint subordinates in proportion to their competence. In any case, let us not expect the chief to regulate by his orders every moment of military life: "An order must contain everything that a subordinate cannot decide, but nothing else" [7]. Without excluding the report, it is autonomy and initiative that must be promoted in culture. If he exercises a command that compresses, the overly voluntarist military leader does not serve the institution. To deny the subordinate in peacetime the right to the greatest possible autonomy is to risk commanding inert masses in difficult times. It is above all acting in the place of the subordinate. In doing so, the leader becomes a usurper and delegates his authority. Not only does he take his subordinate for an incompetent person, but he also deprives him of an action which it is his duty to think and carry out. As a result, he compresses the will of his subordinate and prevents him from adding to it through experience the two ingredients that forge visionaries: knowledge and intuition. The quality of a leader may be in the in-between, but it is vast.

In combat, the effectiveness of a force depends on its ability to adapt, which rests more on the initiatives of subordinates than on the declaratory incantations of the leader, however prophetic he may be. We soldiers know that leaders cannot manage everything in times of crisis. They can manage even less in times of war when the reality of violence is added to the randomness of events. It is understandable that General Desportes wrote that "success in war is more a matter of indirect command - through spirit, sense of mission and freedom of action - than of direct command" [8]. 8] Moreover, the happiest innovations emanate more from the ingenuity of the combatants than from staff decisions. 9] When the reality on the ground takes over, multiple orders sometimes prove to be superfluous. As Colonel Goya [10] explains, in 1944 General Wood travelled nearly 3,000 km at the head of a division of more than 11,000 men by commanding his subordinates by voice. When he had to intervene, the orders he produced never exceeded one page, including a map. He crossed Europe, however, causing the enemy losses ten times greater than his own strength! This efficiency is no doubt due to the quality of his training. It is also, most certainly, due to the type of management and the way in which each person is encouraged to take the initiative for the benefit of all. Certain circumstances or specialties naturally encourage decentralization: the colonial campaigns of the expeditionary forces, the beginnings of the air force, and so on. Today, it is singular to note, while all other things remain relative, that the units noticed for their original solutions are also those whose command culture is the most subsidiary. Tsahal, or in a way the foreign legion, are subsidiary by culture. Special Forces are subsidiary by nature.

In the end, the leader is not asked to regulate the small and direct the normal, but to think big and allow a return to normality. His primary role is not to find the solution, but to create the conditions for a solution to emerge. This perspective encourages us to think of our command culture in a new light, not a new one, but a renewed one.

The principle of subsidiarity carries within itself the seeds of a better organization of armies and their actions, probably more economical and efficient.

Subsidiarity does not call into question either the hierarchy or its responsibility. On the

contrary, the weight of an authority is all the stronger as its interventions are rare or even solicited. They then become obvious to the subordinate and give new impetus to action. When things go wrong, we are told that all eyes turn to the leader. He then becomes a helper, a reserve (*subsidium* in Latin!), and brings real added value. It is in this way that the pact of trust between leader and subordinate is realized in the face of adversity. The commander is not directly visible in action, but it is known that he will not clear himself because a leader can delegate everything except his responsibility, which precisely does not delegate itself. We read in the manuals that command is based on trust while, at the same time, the weight of indicators, management directives and timetables for the higher authority is reinforced. If co-mandate means to entrust, to pass on, one day we will have to accept a certain dispossession. In this sense, the transparency that is demanded every day is the opposite of trust. It decapitates, by means of cold, computerized automatic indicators, the dialogue of command. It renders authority senseless and illegitimate by de facto depriving it of the privilege of the ability to respond, literally of its responsibility.

Subsidiarity, on the other hand, achieves the union of discipline and freedom. Marshal Foch stressed the importance of active discipline, "a consequence of the constant call to initiative" [11]. The exercise of a subsidiary command does not invite one to be a "little arm". During the most dazzling actions, the great leaders find that they are overtaken by their troops. They do not carry the soldier at arm's length, but regulate, regulate a troop that already adheres to the principle. It is instructive to observe the great freedom enjoyed by the great military leaders of the 20th century. It is perhaps this freedom which, without questioning the necessity of obeying orders, confers on the figures of history the authority that is attributed to them today. Guderian, Rommel, McArthur or Leclerc also built themselves up by their ability to often exceed and, let us say it, sometimes go beyond the orders they received. Thus the liberator of Paris could say on this subject: "What I did best in my career, I did by disobeying" [12]. Military regulations were nevertheless demanding and courts-martial were still in session. Systematically appropriating their orders was their honour and their greatness. But they had a degree of freedom commensurate with the stakes involved. They thus added to the orders they received their own will, their creative capacity, exploited to the exhaustion of their skills. While no one disputes that the strength of armies rests on discipline, history and reason also invite us to admit that discipline is not exclusive to greatness. One can attribute part of the autonomy and authority of Leclerc or Lyautey to the circumstances, to the prestige of the army in their time. It must also be noted that the culture of command was different, and no doubt more subsidiary.

The richness of an organization lies in its men. So how do you optimize the wealth of human capital and unleash its potential? Inspired by Mc Gregor's XY managerial model, the diagram at the end of the article illustrates the virtuous circle initiated by the principle of subsidiarity. At the source of the choice is the profound belief that reigns at the top of the hierarchy. Is man capable in himself? As leaders, let us be aware that our answer to this question conditions the expectations we have of our subordinates, and therefore the way in which our subordinates adapt to our "style of leadership". The good news is that our answer to this question is open-ended. It does not depend on time constraints, financial pressure or the media. This is why the leader is at the heart of an organization's effectiveness. Far from relegating the leader to the background, subsidiarity places him at the origin of a virtuous circle, a powerful driver of human resource development. Over the course of his or her career, each of us has seen the sometimes comical distortion between the responsibilities of a 25-year-old officer at the head of his or her unit or building and those he or she carries once promoted to Commander or Lieutenant-Colonel on staff. The division of tasks from above leads to the crowding out of

subordinates at all times. Over time, it is a real waste of skills that our managers are led to a real waste of skills, regardless of the effectiveness of successive promotions. If the pyramid is turned upside down, everyone is valued without threatening the superior qualities recognized in the leader.

Such an organization opens up unsuspected perspectives and offers its members the opportunity to reveal themselves. It is on this condition that the richness of the experience of the old, the dynamism of the young, the importance of the global vision that is the privilege of the rank and the importance of the field vision that is the privilege of the soldier unite towards a common goal. And this is independent of any value judgment.

In rediscovering authority, we finally rediscover its origin and purpose, and its subsidiary nature. The principle of subsidiarity renews without revolution the exercise of command.

The inescapable corollary of this discovery, however, is a twofold demand: on oneself and on one's subordinates. With regard to oneself, the requirement allows a questioning that leads to progress. Towards one's subordinate, it is for the leader "a way of showing the esteem he holds for him by recognizing his capacity to surpass himself" [13]. [13] We must then accept the errors of our subordinates and the strength to assume the possible failure of decisions that are limited because they are human, with the limits that this implies. Thus, more than technical competence, it is virtue and courage that we must educate future leaders. One could say, in other words, that courage and righteousness are the competence of leaders. This truth of yesterday is reinforced by the media's oversensitivity at a time when risk is not valued. This sheds new light on the process that must govern the training and selection of military elites.

If we agree to re-examine the organization of armies in the light of this principle, we will find the key to a fairer authority and a more dynamic and effective defence. On the other hand, if restructuring and pooling led to a greater centralisation of the levers of action and decision-making, we would miss this opportunity. Have we not come dangerously close to this point? By moving the support functions too far away from the place of concrete action, we take away the levers of command from the subordinate, we empty the authority entrusted to him or her of its substance. His responsibility becomes essentially virtual. From this point of view, rationalization is not necessarily reasonable. It would become reasonable if subsidiarity were placed at the centre of the reforms.

Favouring the exercise of subsidiary authority means finally accepting the risk of giving value to the word of subordinates. Beyond the debates on the status of personnel, the army would find real strength in a renewed command dialogue. It would then experience its own richness and the ability of its officers to think and act differently.

[1] Martin Blumenson, "Lescarnets secrets du Général Patton", éditions Nouveau monde.

[2] Hannah Arendt, "[2] Hannah Arendt, "The crisis of culture", Folio.

[3] Julien Freund, "The essence of politics", éditions Dalloz.

[4] Henri Hude, "Ethics for decision-makers", Renaissance Press.

[5] Edmond Rostand, "L'aiglon", Folio.

[6] Chantal Delsol, "L'État subsidiaire", PUF.

[7] General Von Moltke, quoted in "Le testament de Moltke", Sigismund Von Schlichting, ISC.

[8] General Desportes, *ibid.*

[9] Let us quote for example the adaptation of the 88 mm anti-aircraft gun into an anti-tank weapon during the Second World War or, in another register, the creation of the British SAS.

[10] Colonel Michel Goya, September 18, 2012 post on the blog The Way of the Sword.

[11] Marechal Foch, "Des principes de la guerre", Economica.

[12] General Alain de Boissieu, "Hope", 1994.

[13] The exercise of command in the army, foundations and principles.

Saint-cyrien of the "Saint-Cyr Bicentenary" promotion (1999-2002), the EPSTEIN Battalion Chief served successively as HAP Patrol ^{Commander} in the 6th RHC, TIGRE Unit ^{Commander} in the 4th RHFS, then as a ^{dealing} officer in the office of the Minister of Defence.

Title :	le Chef de bataillon Bertrand EPSTEIN
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